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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6744
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

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DEPT FOR PM/RSAT AND NEA/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/25/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [MARR](#) [MAS](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: FRENCH PARTICIPATION IN THE IRAQ COALITION

REF: STATE 54925

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Embassy Paris has regularly engaged the GoF on possibilities for French participation in the Iraq coalition, but has made little headway given President Chirac's original, adamant opposition to the war. Although the French have generally tried since then to avoid provoking the U.S., and to indicate that they understand the dangers of a precipitate U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, in fact they have done little more than pay lip service to the idea that French interests are also at stake.

¶2. (S) If anything, the French have grown more reticent about Iraq in the final days of Chirac's presidency: The French have taken off the table their long-standing offer to train Iraqi security forces in France; they have canceled plans to open a regional embassy office in Irbil; and they came fairly close to reducing or eliminating their diplomatic presence in Baghdad (an effort that was abandoned only after the French Ambassador in Baghdad strenuously objected to having been cut out of the policy discussion in Paris). A change in French policy is not in prospect before Chirac leaves the Elysee in mid-May.

¶3. (S) Although Chirac's departure may open the door to an eventual reconsideration of France's position, the likelihood of change remains limited in the short-term. We will therefore need to think strategically about when and how to engage on Iraq with France's new president, framing our requests in a manner consonant with French political realities. It would, for example, likely prove futile -- and counterproductive -- to welcome a new French government with a request to put French boots on the ground in Iraq. The overwhelming majority of the French public believes that Chirac's opposition to the Iraq war has been vindicated by subsequent events, a view that has also been endorsed by the two remaining presidential candidates, Nicolas Sarkozy and Segolene Royal. Neither candidate, if elected, would derive any political benefit from reversing that position. To the contrary, Royal would likely face a revolt within her own party, and Sarkozy (who is already under fire from the left for being too pro-American), would risk confirming himself as Washington's toady.

¶3. (S) A more realistic set of goals might include persuading the French to be more supportive of Iraq within an EU context, including by intensifying their civilian capacity-building efforts. We could help lay the groundwork by assisting the GOI to do a better job of screening potential civil service candidates before sending them

overseas (France's Inter-Ministerial Coordinator for Iraq Reconstruction, Jean-Pierre Guinhut, recently complained to us that a batch of Iraqi civil servants sent for training in France included a "60-year-old sheikh who spoke no language other than Arabic, and even that badly"). We might also encourage the French to offer further humanitarian assistance to Iraqi refugees. In time, and particularly as progress is made on national reconciliation and the transfer of security control to the Iraqis (which may help reverse the French perception that Iraq is not yet fully sovereign), we might persuade the French to renew their offer of training for the Iraqi security services or possibly to engage more substantially with the NATO training mission in Iraq. Post will provide further analysis of the possibilities for French engagement once we move past the presidential election and the new government takes office.

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